

United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service

Aviation Safety Alert

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Subject: Parking Tender Responsibilities for Helicopter Personnel

Area of Concern: Helicopter Operations

Distribution: Aviation Operations

Discussion: In the last few years, a number of incidents have demonstrated that the parking tender providing hand signals to the pilot is exposed to potentially serious or fatal injury in the event of an accident at a landing area. Despite the risk, the parking tender is still often expected at improved and established landing areas to assist and direct the pilot by hand signals during landings and departures. Traditionally, helicopter crewmembers have been trained and directed to stand and provide hand signals to the pilot at every landing or departure, whether the pilot needs the assistance or not.

The IHOG, page 2-20 does **not** say that a parking tender must be in or near the safety circle at the landing area for all departures and landings but rather should be in a position to monitor and “supervise activities at the assigned landing pad” and “assist the pilot as needed.” To ensure that safety and oversight are maintained by the parking tender while limiting their exposure and risk at the landing area, see the following recommendations:

Recommendations:

1. Helibase personnel, helicopter managers, and helicopter crewmembers should review the parking tender responsibilities listed in the IHOG starting on page 2-20.
2. The parking tender should have a radio with proper frequencies to communicate with helicopter, deck coordinator, and helibase.
3. The parking tender must understand the importance of supervising all activities at the landing pad whenever the assigned helicopter's engine is running, or when it is departing or landing.
4. The presence of the parking tender using hand signals at or near the safety circle may be unnecessary at airports, permanent helibases, and temporary helibases with well-established approach and departure routes, designated touch down pads, adequate clearances, air and ground hazards removed or identified, and with takeoff and landing communications established. However, the parking tender should be available to provide hand signals if the situation dictates or is requested and always have an unobstructed view of all helicopter traffic, departing and landing.

5. A parking tender should be present and provide hand signals or communicate directions and hazards to the pilot on their first landing at improved and established helibases.
6. A parking tender should be present and provide hand signals or communicate directions and hazards to the pilot at all helispots and established unimproved landing areas when staffed.

The hazards that potentially threaten the parking tender while directing helicopters within the safety circle can be considerable. Therefore, if physical marshalling by the parking tender is necessary it should be done outside the safety circle and within sight of the pilot. Parking tender procedures should be briefed with helicopter pilots and all crewmembers.

This Safety Alert has been coordinated with the Department of Interior, Aviation Management Directorate.

/s/ Ron Hanks
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U.S. Forest Service